



OPERA CO-CREATION (Preliminary Report)

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CASMP	Creative, Artistic and Social Management Plan
DoA	Description of Action
EC	European Commission
FM	François Matarasso
INO	Irish National Opera
LICEU	El Gran Teatre del Liceu
SAMP	Sociedade Artística Musical dos Pousos
WP	Work Package



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document sets out the TRACTION project's current thinking on co-creation in opera. It is described as a preliminary report because the co-creation activities in the project's community opera trials are continuing, and it is important to be able to draw on the full range of research before reaching final conclusions. This report will therefore be revised and updated in the second half of 2022.

[Chapter 2](#) introduces TRACTION and the community opera trials in Barcelona, Portugal and Ireland through which it is exploring the potential of artistic co-creation to address social exclusion. It also describes briefly the digital technologies that are being developed to facilitate that process.

[Chapter 3](#) describes the alternative visions that have shaped cultural policy in Europe since the 19th century, showing how the idea of co-creation, although new in its current form, has important precedents. It suggests that the rise of participation and the language of co-creation is less helpful than it seems because cultural policy itself is becoming more necessary but less coherent.

[Chapter 4](#) looks at the origins of co-creation in the world of globalised commerce and questions whether there is a common understanding of what the concept means or its values. It argues that because it has been coined to describe work that involves people with different interests and power, it is always confronted with difficult ethical questions. The chapter goes on to consider how co-creation has been adopted in the arts, and especially in participatory art, before concluding by looking at some attempts to frame the practice with principles.

[Chapter 5](#) outlines how TRACTION responds to this complex landscape of ideas and practice, including proposing a spectrum of co-creation as a way to understand the approach of different projects. It then describes in detail how each trial positions itself within that spectrum and describes the activities that have been undertaken to date. Reference is made to Deliverable 4.3, on co-creation evaluation, which reports preliminary findings from the trials.

[Chapter 6](#) explains why a new approach to co-creation may be needed and defines the work that remains to be done on this during the remainder of the project.



2 TRACTION AND CO-CREATION

Article 27. (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)¹

In addition to being an art form, opera has always been a social, economic and political phenomenon.

Daniel Snowman²

2.1 The TRACTION Project

Opera uses the resources of visual and performing art to create extraordinary experiences of passion, sensibility and ideas. It is recognized as a great achievement of European culture and history. And yet a form that has been capable of inspiring radical change is now widely seen as the staid preserve of conservative privilege. The three-year [TRACTION](#) research project aims to contribute to opera's renewal as a territory of cultural and social inclusion. It does so by moving from the limited policy of **cultural democratisation**—essentially making opera more attractive to those who don't attend—towards the more demanding idea of **cultural democracy**, which involves finding new ways for people at risk of social exclusion to co-create opera performances with professional artists, telling stories that are important to them, and reconnecting the form with its socially progressive potential.

TRACTION is researching how this can be done through three community opera trials that offer a range of scale, social context, approaches and artistic values, within an overarching principle of artistic co-creation:

LICEU

Led by [El Gran Teatre del Liceu](#), this is the largest and most ambitious TRACTION community opera trial, with a main stage production in Barcelona's 170-year-old opera house scheduled for October 2022. The opera focuses on the Raval neighbourhood, which is immediately beside the theatre and is characterised by social, economic and ethnic diversity. Entitled *La Gata Perduda (The Lost Cat)*, it is inspired by the librettist's interviews with Raval residents. Local people are involved in co-creation of the visual branding, costumes and other aspects of the production, while amateur choirs and music students will perform alongside professional artists. Because the Covid 19 pandemic has delayed the production by a year, a showcase of the co-creation process and work will be presented at the Liceu and locations in Raval on 19 March 2022, using the TRACTION Co-Creation Stage technology.





SAMP

The [Sociedade Artística Musical dos Pousos](#) (SAMP) is an independent music school in Leiria, central Portugal, with an exceptionally strong community music programme for everyone from babies to the dying. SAMP musicians have been working in the city's youth prison since 2004, first as volunteers, and more recently with funding from Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, which supported the creation of Mozart opera productions in 2015 and 2017. The TRACTION trial builds on that experience through the co-creation of a new opera, written and composed by professional artists with inmates, relatives and staff members, using Co-Creation Space. The production will also use Co-Creation Stage technology to link people inside and outside the prison, in performances in Lisbon and Leiria. There will be a pilot in June 2021, with the full-scale production in June 2022.



INO:

Founded just three years ago, [Irish National Opera](#) is the youngest of the partners but it is already building a reputation for its use of new media to innovate in opera. In response to this interest, and the absence of large theatres in most of Ireland, the INO trial is the first community opera to be created in and for Virtual Reality (VR). The communities involved reflect a cross-section of Ireland today, including Irish speakers from the Atlantic island of Inis Meáin, teenagers from different rural districts and adults from Dublin. The production they are co-creating with professional artists will be experienced through VR headsets, and will tour throughout the country in 2022, supported in some events with live music.



The TRACTION community opera trials are designed to offer a wide range of experiences, and operate at three distinct scales: an urban neighbourhood (Barcelona), a small city (Leiria) and a country (Ireland). Their creative strategies also require different technologies:

- **Co-Creation Space**, led by [CWI](#) in the Netherlands, is a digital tool that supports asynchronous communication between people involved in artistic co-creation. This technology, which is proving unexpectedly important during the pandemic, is now being piloted by INO and later in the year by LICEU.
- **Co-Creation Stage**, led by [Vicomtech](#) in Spain, allows performances to be co-created for single audiences from remote locations in real time. The technology was successfully trialled during an event at Leiria Prison in January 2021, and will be central to the SAMP performances this year and next. The technology will also be used in the LICEU showcase in March 2022.
- **Immersive environments**, principally in the form VR technology, are being tested by [Virtual Reality Ireland](#), [DCU \(Dublin City University\)](#) with Irish National Opera. In addition, experiments with Social VR involving CWI are planned for autumn 2021, while other, perhaps non-technological, ideas about immersive experiences will be explored by INO in the context of festival presentations of the touring VR opera.



The other partners in TRACTION are the [Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona](#), which leads on evaluation of the trials, and [François Matarasso](#), an expert in participatory art who is supporting the co-creation process and evaluation.



LICEU Community dialogue session, Barcelona March 2021

2.2 TRACTION's evolving understanding of co-creation

As the previous section makes clear, co-creation is at the heart of TRACTION, from the original proposal that opera can and must change by including under-represented voices in the artistic process, to the concepts of each community opera trial, and the innovative technologies being developed to support them. It is probably fair to say that, in developing the project, the partners took the term at face value, using co-creation as a proxy for 'people working together on artistic projects'. That, indeed, is how it has been widely used in the art world, where it has become common in the past five or ten years. However, as TRACTION progresses, it has become clear that the term 'co-creation' itself need testing and clarification. In [Chapter Three](#) of this report, we outline how the idea of people participating in the creation of culture has often been opposed to the simpler and more established idea of people consuming culture. We argue that these alternative visions of the social role of culture have, at least in their modern form, been contested since the early 19th century, even though the term itself is very recent (as we explain in [Chapter Four](#)).

But before considering either the contested position of participation in cultural policy, or how that is being changed by emerging theories of co-creation, it is worth revisiting how co-creation was described in the original proposal. The term is not specifically defined, perhaps because it did not seem necessary to do so. Instead, the following explanation of what it means is given in the context of the SAMP community opera trial:



Opera co-creation, where the inmates and the opera professionals, with the help of facilitators (both social and artistic facilitators), will define the co-created opera format. All the co-design decisions will be made by consensus between all participants.³

The central idea is that co-creation involves professional artists and facilitators working with community members (in this case prison inmates) to write, compose and produce an opera. This principle, as the present report makes clear, is sound and represents a simple, if limited, definition of co-creation. It is also what has been happening in the three trials, as described in [Part Five](#). But TRACTION's work has now shown that this loose explanation is insufficient and, more problematically, that its apparent simplicity risks obscuring the inequalities of power that make co-creation important but also difficult.

The grant agreement states that 'by combining best practice in participatory art with digital technology's innovations of language, form and process, TRACTION will define new approaches to co-creation'. This Deliverable is the first stage in that necessary and important process of testing and refining a concept that is becoming widely used. not only in the arts but in many other disciplines and professions. [Part Four](#) sets out some problems we have identified and how they have been addressed so far. [Part Five](#) describes the practicalities of opera co-creation within TRACTION, while [Part Six](#) outlines some of the questions that remain to be resolved. Since the project has not yet reached its half-way point, it seems important that some of these should stay open for now. TRACTION's final analysis of co-creation will be provided at the end of the project.



3 CO-CREATION AND CULTURAL POLICY

3.1 The historic roots of cultural policy in Europe: 1830s to 1930s

3.1.1 Public culture in the industrial city

The values and practices of contemporary European culture are still defined by ideas that emerged during the Enlightenment, and the period of industrialisation and imperialism with which it is associated. There are older influences, of course: opera emerged in Renaissance Italy, which itself took inspiration from the Classical past.⁴ But it is the Enlightenment's invention of the Fine Arts that automatically (and carelessly) relegated most human culture to a subordinate position as the 'not-fine arts' defined by adjectives such as amateur, traditional, folk or popular arts, as well as concepts like craft and entertainment.⁵ The philosophical innovations of the Enlightenment gave European art extraordinary new energy that became a new social and economic importance with the growth of industrial cities. It is here that the first efforts at cultural inclusion can be found, and they frame the alternative top-down and bottom-up strategies that still define cultural policy.

From the top down: Philanthropy and the civilising mission

The social elites who controlled and benefited from 19th century Europe's industrial expansion feared that the large urban populations their factories needed would be drawn towards the Enlightenment's more revolutionary ideas. So, among other attempts to reduce social discontent, they applied some of their excess wealth to establishing art galleries, museums, libraries, concert halls and (more rarely) opera houses with the express purpose of 'civilising' the people. Culture, public and commercial, thus helped drive the rapid expansion of a middle class with an interest in social stability and new forms of civic life. Art became an increasingly important mark of distinction, to use Bourdieu's term.⁶ In Britain, industrialists such as Andrew Carnegie, Joseph Rowntree, Henry Tate and William Lever built cultural institutions that continue to dominate the landscape, literally and metaphorically. These men of Empire saw this as part of the 'civilising mission', not as democratising culture: to some of them democracy was itself a revolutionary idea. But in the second half of the 20th century, the legacy of their ideals was recast in more democratic terms by the new welfare states.

From the bottom up: culture, education and social change

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the cultural paternalism of the rich was balanced and often contested by the autonomous cultural action of working people, especially the skilled labourers who established their own libraries, institutes and associations. The Salford Lyceum is a typical example. Established in 1838, it recruited over 2000 members in just two years, including some women, each of whom paid an annual fee to access its library, classes, lectures and other cultural activities.⁷ Such groups sprang up across the continent, often



linked with the labour movement; they had an emancipatory, sometimes political vision. They sought access not only to what Matthew Arnold called ‘the best that has been thought and known in the world’⁸ but to the whole spectrum of culture including that of working people. They claimed an equal right to high culture, including the right to question, enlarge and reject that culture, and to defend other forms of cultural expression. Although the term was not invented until the early 1970s, many of these people would have been happy to think they were working towards cultural democracy. They were, after all, fighting for democracy in every other aspect of their lives.

3.1.2 Conservative and progressive visions of culture

Each approach reflected the different positions on the social ladder occupied by their advocates, but there was agreement on one thing: culture was important, in itself and as a path to self-improvement. That agreement helps explain the blurred lines between top-down and bottom-up approaches to cultural access. Discussing the ‘civilising mission’ in the context of colonialism, Harry Liebersohn notes that:

Sometimes it involved a large degree of external imposition, but at other times, non-Europeans appropriated Western culture for their own ends.⁹

This appropriation was equally common within those European societies that used the civilising mission to justify their colonialism, where working people turned to elite culture for their own purposes.¹⁰ The key difference between these two visions of culture was whether the personal development achieved through engaging with art could, or should, translate into social change and, if so, what kind of social change. Even with its best intentions, the top-down cultural mission has an essentially conservative purpose. Its claim to universalism obscures that it promotes elite culture, values and interpretations in order to preserve them and the social order they represent. Didier Maleuvre argues that:

Culture is the sum of activities by means of which a society copies and transmits itself, recommends itself to its members, and cements its identity. Culture is therefore conservative by nature. To the effect that, as a branch of culture, art is part of society’s conservative system of self-reproduction. [...] And it behooves us to keep this in mind—at whatever point of history we look, we find the art which its society **wanted and maintained for its own advantage.**¹¹

This statement, with its implicit ideal of one society with a single identity, begs the question who is ‘its society’? Is it the city fathers who built galleries and museums in the image of Roman temples and to their own glory, or the far greater number of people who might recognise themselves and their values in such institutions only in part or not at all?

It is necessary to go back to the 19th century, and the beginning of the modern city, because that is when these different visions of access to culture begin to establish themselves. They turned then, as they do today, on whether culture is imagined as a fixed and universal value or as a territory of interpretation and contestation. Or, to frame the question in TRACTION’s terms: is opera an art of self-reproduction, where directors alone are licenced to innovate,



or is it a common heritage that all can interpret and reinvent? On one side, the civilising mission of cultural democratisation encourages those who do not attend to discover and be transformed by the experience of opera. On the other, the ideals of cultural democracy assert a universal right to make opera in whatever ways and for whatever purpose those involved decide. It is, in short, an argument about power and control—and it is the unavoidable tension within co-creation.

3.2 Cultural policy and the welfare state: 1940s to 1980s

3.2.1 The civilising mission becomes cultural democratisation

The foundations of modern cultural policy in Europe were laid during and after the Second World War.¹² They were shaped by the intellectual and physical legacy of the civilising mission, recast as ‘cultural democratisation’, better to reflect the ideals of the welfare states that were one of the most profound outcomes of the conflict. Among the social responsibilities these welfare states took on when they nationalised large parts of industry were the previous owners’ tradition of cultural patronage. In the 1950s, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, access to culture was extended through state broadcasters and funding of cultural institutions. For the historian, Tony Judt:

The broad Western European consensus of the age held that only the state had the resources to service the cultural needs of its citizens: left to themselves, individuals and communities would lack both means and initiative. It was the responsibility of a well-run public authority to deliver cultural nourishment no less than food, lodging and employment.¹³

Access to art was written into the social contract, literally so in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and in the Preamble to the 1946 French Constitution. This was a transformative idea, and one that would later be used to challenge the ideal of cultural democratisation that inspired it. It also provides the basis for TRACTION’s approach to co-creation, as explained [below](#). For now, though, if the basis of cultural access was changing with the times, the belief in a single, universal culture expressing the best human values remained. Despite their modernist appearance, new post-war theatres and concert halls served the old art valued by social elites.

Believing in culture

Laurent Fleury describes this idea of cultural democratisation as:

A project to convert the public to privileged symbolic forms, which presupposes a strategy of proselytization of the masses in the service of scholarly or literary works and with the objective of making as many people as possible visit and venerate the works judged to be legitimate.¹⁴

Fleury, a sociologist, uses religious language (‘culte’, ‘consacrées’ in the original French) to define this ideology, highlighting the faith equally implicit in the civilising mission and in



cultural democratisation. Both philosophies seek to convert people to a full appreciation of culture, in the belief that they will find the experience as valuable as does the advocate. It should be recognised that those who established this as the foundation of post-war cultural policy, like their philanthropic predecessors and their public service successors, were motivated by good intentions, according to their own lights. Feeling enriched by their own access to a body of cultural experiences, ideas and works, they wished to share those treasures widely. It is common, perhaps even natural, for people to seek to persuade others to share their enthusiasms, tastes and ideas.

But the meaning of that desire changes when it becomes policy, backed with the authority and resources of the state. It becomes a mechanism for supporting the art which a society—or, more accurately, the leadership of a society—‘wanted and maintained for its own advantage’. Then both the culture and the institutions democratising it risk being seen as, or becoming, oppressive. In a wartime lecture entitled ‘Art and Democracy’, the curator Kenneth Clark recognised that:

It goes without saying that [people] must not have art stuffed down their throats. This was a common practice in the last century, arising partly out of the middle classes’ genuine desire for self-improvement [...] and apt to lead, in England above all, to repugnance and rebellion; but perhaps it was less disastrous than the modern practice of asking people what they like.¹⁵

Clark preferred instead ‘to tempt people with scraps’, while cautioning that ‘they must not be spoon fed or they will never learn to feed themselves and soon will be too lazy even to open their mouths.’¹⁶ Such patrician condescension seems shocking today, but how far are the methods advocated by Clark from today’s education and outreach programmes?

The fairness and effectiveness of cultural democratisation

Cultural democratisation, understood principally as extending access to art and culture, remains the principal justification for spending public money to subsidise and promote the arts in European states. It is broadly accepted by the public, though the fairness of the distribution is sometimes a matter of political debate. One criticism is geographical distribution, as the concentration of facilities and creative people in regional and especially capital cities absorb most of the funding. The trend for creating institutional outposts such as Tate Liverpool, and Louvre Lens is one response, it has met with uneven success. Another, more suited to the performing arts, is touring, which is INO’s lifeblood, though the size of venues dictates the scale of productions. As its name implies, Irish National Opera is tasked with serving the whole country, but the only theatres able to receive a large-scale opera production are in Dublin, Cork and Belfast.

Another challenge to the policy of cultural democratisation is that in supporting a small and sometimes contested part of artistic creation it uses universal taxation to subsidise the pleasures of a wealthy minority. Opera, as the most expensive subsidised art form and one predominantly enjoyed by elites, has long been the epicentre of this argument.¹⁷ The opera house—in many European countries distinguished by Royal patronage—is the very symbol



of unfairness in a public culture system still shaped by wealth and class. Political debate about the welfare state normally focuses on social protection of the poor but it has always been the middle class who have benefited most from health, education and cultural services.¹⁸ Opera is one of the rare places where that reality is disconcertingly visible.

But the most sober criticism of cultural democratisation may be that it is ineffective. Evidence of its success, after more than 70 years, is limited and ambiguous. The contrast with education makes this very clear. The gradual extension of education to all has transformed European societies, to the great benefit both of poor families and society as a whole. It is hard to see similar social change after 70 years cultural democratisation. The UK Government's regular 'Taking Part Survey' reports that the 'proportion of respondents who had engaged with the arts in the last 12 months' was 76% in 2019/20, exactly where it was in 2005/06.¹⁹ In *Culture is Bad for You*, Orian Brook, Dave O'Brien and Mark Taylor give a detailed analysis of the relationships culture and inequality in England, looking at both consumption and production. They conclude that there is:

[A] distance between much of what our cultural occupations produce (and what the state funds) from the majority of the population. [...] [That suggests] a disconnection between cultural production, cultural consumption, and whole swathes of the population. This is especially true when we think about the intersection of class, race, and gender.²⁰

Nor can they identify evidence of social mobility in the creative workforce, which in their research shows, if anything, a decline among cohorts born between 1953 and 1992, under policies of cultural democratisation.²¹ Patterns of cultural production and consumption have changed greatly since the 1950s, but there is scant evidence to show that is because of cultural democratisation; indeed those who defend the policy are often critical of cultural values today. In fact, that cultural change is associated with much larger social, political and economic factors, including rising education, prosperity and leisure, the information and technological revolution, and the spread of democracy. As the critic Clive James observes:

There was never a time like now to be a lover of the arts. Mozart never heard most of Bach. We can hear everything by both of them. Brahms was so bowled over by Carmen that he saw twenty performances, but he had to buy twenty opera tickets to do so. Manet never saw all his paintings in one place: we can. While Darcey Bussell dances at Covent Garden, the next Darcey Bussell can watch her from Alice Springs. Technology not only has given us a permanent present, but has given it the furniture of eternity.²²

This is indeed a brimming cornucopia, but it is possible that the very abundance of cultural riches and their ease of (online) access is making them less and less valuable. This is, after all, an age when Paul McCartney gives his new record to readers of a Sunday newspaper.²³ Little wonder, then, if Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker end their historical survey of opera on a melancholy note, suggesting that

Ever-easier access to opera may do little to ameliorate an overall attrition in the numbers of those who care whether opera exists at all.²⁴



3.2.2 Community art, participation and cultural democracy

The challenge to the policy of cultural democratisation did not take long to arrive. It was produced by the policy itself and by the larger changes brought about by the welfare state of which it was part. The children of the post-war baby boom came of age in the 1960s, having benefited from peace, democracy, education, health care and growing prosperity (although, in the nature of such things, they did not always appreciate what they had gained over previous generations). Many entered new universities and art schools, the first in their family ever to access higher education. They were primed to question the paternalism from which they had benefited. The result was the cultural revolution of the 1960s that, with the neoliberal reaction against it of the 1980s, has defined our subsequent lives.

The emergence of cultural democracy

The reaction against cultural democratisation was broad and varied, taking in popular music, advertising, cinema, university teaching, radical politics, race relations, feminism, sexual liberation and much more. Its diversity was both a strength and a weakness. It was everywhere, but struggled to establish a coherent—or sometimes comprehensible—alternative values or programmes. In publicly-funded culture, the reaction was led by community arts or ‘*actions culturelles*’—projects nourished from such diverse sources as avant-garde art, popular education, community development and Marxism. An early theoretical critique of cultural democratisation was set out in the ‘*Déclaration de Villeurbanne*’, published in May 1968 by a group of artists, students and trade unionists who asserted that:

It is our very attitude toward culture that is challenged in the most radical fashion. However pure our intentions, this attitude appears to a considerable number of our fellow citizens to be effectively a choice made by the privileged in favour of a hereditary, exclusive, in simple terms, bourgeois culture.²⁵

Claiming to have been ‘more or less victims’ of this bourgeois culture, the authors argued for a completely new approach to cultural policy and support:

Because it is now entirely clear that no definition of culture will be valid nor will have any meaning unless it is clearly useful to the people concerned.²⁶

Unfortunately, the declaration’s action points failed to match its stirring ideals, being primarily concerned with the quantity and distribution of public subsidy for culture. But in 1976 that these ideas found a more coherent policy concept: cultural democracy. That year, the Council of Europe convened a conference of European ministers of culture and education ‘to compare problems of cultural policy in relation to their shared acceptance of democratic values’. This event can be regarded as a landmark in post-war European cultural policy. The conference concluded by adopting an important series of resolutions, in the first of which the politicians adopted the following principles for cultural policy:

- I. Policy for society as a whole should have a cultural dimension stressing the development of human values, equality, democracy and the improvement of the



human condition, in particular by guaranteeing freedom of expression and creating real possibilities for making use of this freedom.

- II. Cultural policy should be regarded as an indispensable part of governmental responsibility and should be worked out in conjunction with policies for education, leisure and recreation and sport, the environment, social affairs, town planning, etc.
- III. Cultural policy can no longer limit itself exclusively to taking measures for the development, promotion and popularisation of the arts; an additional dimension is now needed which by recognising the plurality of our societies, reinforces respect for individual dignity, spiritual values and the rights of minority groups and their cultural expressions. In such a cultural democracy, special efforts must be made on behalf of disadvantaged and hitherto underprivileged groups in society.
- IV. There should be an innovatory aspect in cultural policy and encouragement for the development of a wide range of new sociocultural activities so that all may take an active part in the cultural life of their community with a view, inter alia, to helping bridge differences between generations.
- V. It is necessary to promote the development of “outreaching” cultural activities, e.g. for people in sparsely populated or rural areas, at work-places, etc. and ensure the provision of adequate facilities for these activities, e.g. by encouraging the use of new distribution channels, promoting new techniques and in ensuring a wide range of local premises, both specially provided and through the use of libraries, schools, halls, etc.
- VI. Cultural policy has a most important educational element, and must encourage, in particular, new ways of allowing children to exercise their creative talents and thus to ensure a full development of their cultural potential, and a new aesthetic sensibility to the environment.
- VII. It is important to encourage a more critical understanding of the products of the mass media, and to ensure that there, is a wide range of choice, with opportunities for access to communication in the various media.
- VII. Cultural policy also has a special responsibility to counteract the negative effects of commercialised production of mass culture, e.g. by offering alternatives based on quality, by ensuring a wide range of products and by using more fully the native resources of each cultural community.²⁷

It is important to cite the conference resolution at length because it sets a conceptual and policy framework that validates the grassroots work of cultural actors from the working people who established the Salford Lyceum in 1830s to the community artists working for social change in the 1970s—and to anyone with a democratic vision of culture today. The Oslo Resolutions proposed cultural democracy as a coherent alternative to cultural democratisation, and did so through a political statement adopted by ministers representing 22 European states, with observers from the European Commission, UNESCO and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. This was a long way from the occupation of a provincial theatre in Villeurbanne.

The resolution is doubly important because, allowing for its sometimes-dated language and assumptions, it advances ideas and claims that are still not fulfilled. Indeed, they can be



seen to shape the analysis that underpins the TRACTION project: Specifically, TRACTION concurs that:

- ‘Popularisation of the arts’ is not enough;
- ‘The plurality of society [...] the rights of minority groups and their cultural expressions’ need to be recognised;
- ‘There should be an innovatory aspect in cultural policy and encouragement for the development of a wide range of new sociocultural activities so that all may take an active part in the cultural life of their community’.
- ‘New distribution channels, promoting new techniques’ are needed, even if new digital technologies could not be imagined in 1976
- ‘Cultural policy has a most important educational element’ and the TRACTION project places informal learning at the heart of its work.

In 1976, community artists recognised the Oslo Resolutions as the most important articulation of their ideas, and their commitment to empowering people to participate actively in the arts and the cultural life of the community, a phrase which made deliberate reference to article 27.i of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They adopted the term ‘cultural democracy’ to describe what they were doing, especially in the UK, in France and in the USA, while continuing to describe their practice as community arts or *action culturelle*. They did not speak of co-creation because, as explained in the next chapter, the term did not exist.

In 1976, the case for people’s right to be actors in a diverse cultural life had rarely been stronger, but the neoliberal revolution was already gathering. The Oslo Resolutions drew on democratic and social values that would be severely tested by political, economic, social and cultural change in the 1980s and subsequent decades. In addition to the well-known aspects of this ideology, two have had a particularly strong impact on community art and it is important to note them here. One is the commodification and commercialisation of culture (anticipated by Principles VII and VIII in the Oslo Resolutions) which has increased art’s economic, social and political importance, but at the cost of democratic debate or oversight. The other is the rise of individualism and a parallel weakening of collective forms of social action, including the practice of community development that was a cornerstone of community art. This contributed to the rebranding of community art as participatory art in the 1990s,²⁸ in a process with parallels in the emergence of co-creation as a label over the last decade, as we shall see in the next chapter.

3.3 The fragmentation of cultural policy: 1990s to the present

3.3.1 The normalisation of participatory art

In *A Restless Art, How participation won and why it matters*, François Matarasso argues that participatory art has become normalised in the past 20 years, an assessment broadly shared by the authors of *Cultural Policies in Europe: A Participatory Turn?* (2020).²⁹ The idea that participation has become central to art and culture might seem paradoxical, give the



changes noted at the end of the last section, but the evidence is clear. A way of working that was at best at marginal 40 years ago is now mainstream, bringing with it new, and much greater attention to the idea of co-creation.

To take one example, the British government's decision to commemorate the centenary of the First World War through art commissions indicates a high degree of official support for cultural participation. According to 14-18 Now, the organisation established to manage the programme, 107 artistic projects in more than 220 locations across the UK, reached a total of 35 million people.³⁰ Many of the commissions—e.g. Jeremy Deller's '[We're Here Because We're Here](#)', Artichoke's '[Processions](#)' and Dany Boyle's '[Pages of the Sea](#)'—involved mass participation, though generally in closely controlled forms. Such a programme inevitably raises many questions but it is an undeniable marker of the political and social importance that participatory art has acquired in recent years. It is also striking that 14-18 Now was financed and overseen by the political party that was so hostile to public spending on the arts (especially community art) in the 1980s, under Margaret Thatcher's premiership.

3.3.2 Economic and social policy engages with culture

The increase in funding and therefore in public cultural supply has been accompanied by a fragmentation, even a disintegration of cultural policy. Redefined as part of the creative industries (an ambiguous, not to say opaque, concept) culture has become an increasingly important aspect of economic policy, with publicly-funded institutions riding the coat tails of wealth-generating sectors such as film, advertising and computer games. The idea of creative cities, promoted by media gurus like Richard Florida, also captured policy-makers' imagination, giving new impetus to culture-led regeneration and leading to the creation of new cultural infrastructure not seen since the 1950s or even the 1870s. Although the rhetoric of the creative economy has quietened since the 2008 financial crisis, the continuing interest of policy-makers in these ideas is evident in the scale of cultural recovery funds invested by many rich nations during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the established principle of cultural democratisation continues to guide public policy in most European countries, largely unquestioned by professionals, politicians or the public, protected by long-held beliefs about cultural value and hierarchies. Its only alternative, cultural democracy, vanished from the policy lexicon in the 1990s, when communism collapsed and a triumphant neoliberalism celebrated the end of history. Community art became participatory art and secured its future by demonstrating the social impact that it had been producing for decades.³¹ That was important in a wider policy context, and led to participatory art being funded from education, social services and health budgets, but it also encouraged some policy-makers and critics to see participation as a social rather than an artistic concern. With cultural democracy in retreat, if not in hiding, democratisation remained the only basis for public cultural policy, despite the incursion of other fields, such as economics, into culture.

Nonetheless, the criticisms of cultural democratisation remain, and there are signs that what hold it had on the public imagination is waning. Recent decades have seen a steady



rise in democracy, education, leisure, prosperity and social diversity in Europe, contributing not only to culture's importance, but changing how people see and engage with it. IN the 1970s, community artists spoke of wanting to put the means of cultural production into the hands of working people. That has happened, far more profoundly than they imagined. It has also been accompanied by unprecedented access to the means of publication, distribution and critique. Old hierarchies, in which opera was the pinnacle of the arts, are crumbling, not under the attacks of community artists but, as Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker suggest, from the indifference of citizens faced with a seemingly limitless supply of cultural product. In an overcrowded, aggressive cultural market place, the customer's attention is won with money and drama. Art that reveals its value slowly and requires some effort of co-creation on the part of its audience is outgunned by computer generated imagery. The result is not only the marginalisation of much that has long been considered the best that human beings have been able to create. It may also be the replacement of culture as a space for cultural negotiation by one of mere consumption—neither cultural democratisation not cultural democracy but cultural pacification.

3.3.3 Cultural policy without policy

It is in this context that participation is seen as the solution, or at least part of it, by those who defend established cultural values and the policy of cultural democratisation. This may be seen in Arts Council England's strategy for 2020-30, *Let's Create*. Here, the 75-year-old state cultural funding body bases its 'case for change' on the fact 'that there are still widespread socio-economic and geographic variances in levels of engagement with publicly funded culture', accepting, in effect, the inequalities reported by Brook *et al.*³² It goes on to make a distinction between creativity, which it describes as making a work of art, and culture, which it sees as the result of that creation. The meaningfulness of this distinction is open to question, but what matters is Arts Council England's intention that everyone should have access to both kinds of opportunities—to engage with culture *and* to make art. It uses the principles of cultural democracy (although it does not use the term) when it says that:

The vision of this Strategy, therefore, is of a country in which the creativity of everyone living here is celebrated and supported: in which culture forms and transforms communities, and in which cultural institutions are inclusive of all of us, so that whoever we are and wherever we live, we can share in their benefits.³³

Elsewhere, ACE makes a statement that, if it is to be believed, is extraordinary to have come from a state cultural institution:

We do not believe that certain types or scales of creative activity are inherently better or of greater value than others: excellence can be found in village halls and concert halls, and in both the process of participation and the work that is produced.³⁴

For over 50 years, community artists have tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Arts Council that the process of participation can be as valuable as the art it produces. In a sentence, that principle is accepted and, what is more, cultural hierarchies are abolished. But if no



cultural activity is ‘inherently better or of greater value than others’, on what basis does a cultural institution such as ACE body make its spending decisions? Its investment principles—‘Ambition and Quality’, ‘Inclusivity and Relevance’, ‘Dynamism’ and ‘Environmental Responsibility’—are so vague and well-meaning as to justify almost any choices. Who could oppose them? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is performative policy-making rather than a coherent statement of belief and intent.

The post-political age of cultural policy

Allowing for differences in tone, and the cautious language of a public funding institution, *Let’s Create* is close to the vision of the Oslo Resolutions (but 45 years late). If, using ACE’s own terms, that results in everyone’s artistic creativity being celebrated and supported, it would indeed be a radical and positive change. But is this more than the good intentions so characteristic of cultural democratisation? Neither ACE’s 10-year strategy, nor the delivery plan it published in April 2021, mentions community art, participatory art or co-creation. Participation appears rarely and not usually in the context of artistic creation. And yet, two years before publishing *Let’s Create*, Arts Council England seemed to endorse these practices when it commissioned and published a report entitled *Cultural Democracy in Practice*, with many examples of participatory practice. Here co-creation is described as:

A term that reflects a mutually beneficial relationship, maximising the expertise of everyone in the room, to create a process or product that everyone has played an active role in. It is a simple concept that generates outcomes that all contributors can feel proud of.³⁵

The suggestion that co-creation is a simple concept illustrates the problem of what might be termed this post-political age of cultural policy. For two centuries, two large and complex visions of culture were in competition, each rooted in a sophisticated analysis of the nature, value and social role of art. From the elite came a vision of culture as civilising, universal and unifying, in which access to its finest resources was the principal goal, and the path of self-improvement. To this, working people opposed a broader, more generous culture, that could empower individuals *and* groups, and which saw a democratic value in debate about ideas and tastes. Each vision reflected the interests of different social groups and could therefore be developed, implemented and contested as forms of cultural policy. Today, as Arts Council England’s strategy document shows, neither of these traditions is properly understood by those responsible for cultural policy; nor do they have an alternative theory to offer. We are left with good intentions in the place of a democratically accountable exercise of power. That is inadequate in itself. At a time when people are turning towards co-creation, in and beyond the arts, it is especially dangerous because, as we discuss in the next chapter, the unequal distribution of power is intrinsic to co-creation.



4 EMERGENT THEORIES OF CO-CREATION

4.1 Cultural policy and co-creation

The previous chapter made little reference to co-creation because the term was not in use before the 21st century, either in the arts or anywhere else. But, as our account of the evolution of cultural policy in Europe shows, the idea of non-professionals participating in the creation of culture was promoted—and contested—from the early years of the 19th century. It is important to understand the ideas and practices that TRACTION is researching within this long continuity of cultural action. The emergence of a new term, at the same time as the idea of cultural participation seems to be becoming accepted by the institutions that so long resisted it, raises important questions, including:

- How is co-creation defined?
- What is the origin of the concept?
- What values does it carry?
- How is it now being used in the arts?

We shall now consider these questions, before turning to TRACTION’s approach and early experiences of co-creation in [Chapter Five](#).

4.2 Defining co-creation

The term co-creation has acquired significant currency in the past two decades, but the ways in which it is used suggest little consensus about its meaning.³⁶ A library search reveals its appearance in titles about competitiveness, marketing, tourism, video games, art, design, governance, education, personal development and shamanism, among others. Such semantic flexibility might be a sign of co-creation’s innovative and emergent status; it could also imply that it is a fashionable idea without stable meaning or intellectual coherence. Actually, co-creation may be both those things, while its sense is settled by time and practice. But, since the use of co-creation to describe artistic work is recent, it is necessary to examine its origins, before turning to its meaning and practice for TRACTION.

As far as the English language is concerned, the leading authorities do not agree whether co-creation even deserves recognition. It does not appear in the Oxford English Dictionary. A Collins Dictionary user proposed its inclusion in 2013, but the suggestion was rejected by the editors.³⁷ It does however appear in the American Merriam-Webster Dictionary, in the form of a verb, ‘cocreate’ (the hyphen is considered a variant) which is defined as:

To create (something) by working with one or more others; to create (something) jointly³⁸



This is a very neutral concept of co-creation. Understood like this, co-creation could describe any opera production, since it requires the collaboration of people with a wide range of artistic expertise: musicians, actors, singers, designers, writers and many others. Some people do indeed use it in this way, as demonstrated by the theatre director, Marcus Romer, in response to a question about co-creation posted on Twitter in March 2021:

Co-devising across artforms. So working with a writer/designer/director to co-create a new piece of work that requires input from all those disciplines.³⁹

But this work might be better described as cross-disciplinary, a more precise and established concept. In fact, people who make opera and other collaborative art, such as theatre, dance or film, do not tend to describe that work as co-creation. Instead, artists reserve it for work with people *outside* the professional art world, where differences of power and interests raise theoretical, political and even moral resonances that concern them.

Power inequalities between professional artists who create work together may be avoided with best practice, but where they do arise, they tend to follow established lines. The duties and authority of a performer, a director and a producer are each different, and reflect hierarchies and principles familiar from other aspects of social organisation. When an artist takes a job, they know, from professional experience and because it is codified in a contract, the basis on which they will work.⁴⁰ That does not apply in co-creation, at least in the sense that it is now used.

If it was necessary to invent this new term, and so recently that most dictionaries do not yet accept it, it is because new forms of value creation have emerged that destabilise the existing order of collaborative work. The innovative aspect in these forms of collaboration is that they involve professionals working with non-professionals. As we saw in [Chapter Three](#), such collaborations emerged in the 1960s community art movement from much older roots. Even so, it is not in the arts but in business that the term co-creation appears to have been coined and been popularised.

4.3 The business origins of ‘co-creation’

In the early 2000s, co-creation begins to be used in business discourse, where it is associated with the huge economic and social change brought about by digital technology and globalisation. Venkat Ramaswamy and Francis Gouillart explain that:

These broad changes in business and society [...] called for co-creation—the practice of developing systems, products, or services through collaboration with customers, managers, employees, and other company stakeholders.⁴¹

Already, the power differentials inherent in co-creation are present in this easy grouping of customers, managers, employees, and stakeholders. The authors pass over the point, but it will be evident that the power and interests of these four types of participant in co-creation are not the same, even if they may partly or temporarily coincide. The unequal nature of



their relationships become clear as Ramaswamy and Gouillart go on to explain that co-creation requires an organisation:

To use the experience of individuals as the starting point, rather than its own products and services. In addition, the development of compelling experiences with individuals requires that they be allowed to engage in interactions of their own choosing. In co-creative enterprises, individuals participate in the design of value through their own experiences.⁴²

If this is co-creation, it is some way from the ideal that is so attractive in societies that have, until recently, made democracy a cardinal virtue. Many wish to see a more equal relationship between producers and consumers, and when the market has become a dominant metaphor of human relations—at the cost of recasting them all as transactional—it is not surprising to find a business concept taken up in other fields, from tourism to governance.⁴³ But the descriptions above suggest that equality and even fairness are much less important in the modern concept of co-creation than many in the arts assume.

4.4 The values of co-creation

The corporate and commercial origins of co-creation make its adaptation to other fields with different values problematic. In Ramaswamy and Gouillart's account co-creation is neither democratic nor egalitarian. Instead, organisations 'use the experience of individuals' and 'allow' them to engage in interactions. There is no doubt that any value (or profit) produced by this controlling process will accrue principally to the corporation applying it, as the authors explain in making their case for co-creation:

The co-creative enterprise is also a formidable productivity engine that can pay for itself many times over [...]. In addition to cutting costs and improving efficiency, co-creation reduces business risk. Most important, the co-creative enterprise is a growth engine. It enhances strategic capital, increases returns, and expands market opportunities. Co-creation draws innovative ideas from customers, employees, and stakeholders at large.⁴⁴

In this vision, the benefits of co-creation boil down to increased profitability based on the innovative ideas extracted from customers, employees, and stakeholders. We may, as has been claimed, be 'witnessing the democratization of value creation'⁴⁵, but it has not been accompanied by democratisation of wealth creation or distribution.⁴⁶ In an age of extraordinary profits in some parts of the globalised consumer economy, there is reason to fear that co-creation, in business at least, can be a form of intellectual colonialism. The civilising mission was characterised by relations of domination and subsidiarity. This business model reverses the direction in which creative and cultural ideas might flow, but does not seem to envisage a different relationship between institutions (in this case corporations) and individuals, whose rights or interests are not even considered.

The difficulty in asking what is meant by co-creation is that the answer depends on who is speaking. That is not just about the different cultures of business, public services or the arts. It is also about people's position in the process, and the degree of power that it confers. As



this discussion shows, co-creation's outward simplicity masks a complex, contested and unstable range of ideas and practices. That might be the most important thing that anyone proposing to use the term needs to accept: they are using an evolving concept and, in doing so, contributing to its further evolution. They are also contributing to its legitimacy, which may or may not be something they intend.

4.5 Uses of co-creation in the arts

4.5.1 Co-creation and audiences

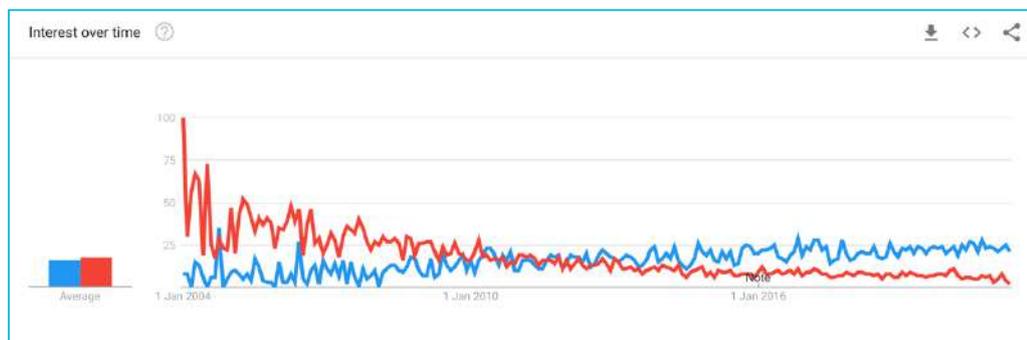


Figure 1. Google Trends data on searches for 'community arts' and 'co-creation', 2004-2021⁴⁷

The graph shows how community arts gradually declined as a search term recorded by Google since 2004, while co-creation has risen. It would be unwise to make too much of this correlation, if only because it is impossible to know the context in which people used co-creation as a search term: it may have been unconnected with arts practice.⁴⁸ Still, it may reflect a change in the language used in the arts world that is evident in its publications.

The first use of co-creation in the arts seems to be associated with practices that involve audiences actively in experiences offered to them. Here the 'relational aesthetics' in contemporary art first theorised by Nicolas Bourriaud have some relevance, but it was in the performing arts, notably in 'immersive theatre', that the term co-creation began to be used more widely.⁴⁹ Whether in the visual or the performing arts, however, the concept was already troublesome, as Ben Walmsley observed in 2013:

Although an all-encompassing definition of co-creation remained elusive, common traits certainly emerged, namely collaboration, agency, interaction, invention, experience, value and exchange. [...] there does seem to be a danger that "co-creation" as a term is applied too liberally and can foster unmet expectations.⁵⁰

4.5.2 Co-creation and participatory art

The use of co-creation to describe participatory or community art is even more recent. Writing in 2013, Walmsley does not directly mention it, considering that co-creation in the performing arts addresses 'a niche, pre-initiated audience' that does not serve a purpose of



cultural democratisation.⁵¹ Today, however, it is in the context of participatory art that many artists now use the term co-creation, as is clear from the many thoughtful responses made to the Twitter post mentioned already:

When making work about people's lived experience co-creators make it with those people, who in turn co-create with the artists and their own expertise. Sharing each's expertise to make something that couldn't happen without that combination of skills and experience. – **Kate Hall**⁵²

At its most basic, making work together. But I perhaps understand it more as professional artists making work together with those who don't do it for a living, in a way that elevates the artistry, opinions and hopes of the latter so they are bound up in whatever is created – **Ned Glasier**⁵³

I mean devising performance with the companies I work with - people living with brain injury, stroke, dementia, facing serious illness and loss. All is devised in rehearsal rooms & participatory decision making is used for dramaturgy. Consent is iterative, final consent consensual – **Lucinda Jarrett**⁵⁴

Co-creation is to bring together people in a process with shared or democratic decision making and equal weight given to each other's respective skills, experience and expertise. This exchange leads to the creation of something, whatever that may be! – **Abdul Shayek**⁵⁵

As this sample illustrates, respondents were often concerned with equality, democracy, and fairness in participatory arts. But they recognised that the term was used in a wide range of ways, including some they did not support:

A lot of places talk about co-creation & means different things across the board. I use it to mean people have been part of the process of deciding what the project will be from its outset, but others mean it is just the process of making a pre-planned un-consulted project but I've read of galleries saying "co-create" to mean took part in a workshop, created something. For me the 'co' stands for 'collaborate' & that for me means every step of an artistic process is done together – **Rosie Aspinall Priest**⁵⁶

The range of uses to which co-creation is put, and the difficulty of agreeing a definition, was widely noted, but was not always seen as problematic. Pat Thompson, a professor of Education at the University of Nottingham said that:

We've wrestled a lot with this when thinking about artists and teachers working together bringing ways of being, knowledges and practices together and making the ethical spaces in between. Many papers and books later we are still thinking. It seems helpful not to resolve it.⁵⁷

4.5.3 Co-creation and ethics in participatory art

Not everyone shares Thompson's commitment to ethics in arts and education projects. The power inequalities in co-creation have ethical and political consequences that are not always acknowledged. Misuse of power, for example in the exploitation of weak actors by



strong ones, is eased by obscurity. The arts sector is not immune to this problem, neither in the work of individual artists nor of cultural institutions.⁵⁸ But community art, rooted in the 1960s challenge to authority, consciously brought art's power relations into the open and some of the artistic practices that have emerged since have adopted similarly emancipatory principles. This accounts for frequent references to the ethics of relations between professionals and non-professionals in the Twitter discussion:

Using the term co-creation and attaching it to a project for me signals an attitude, a stance, an ethos whereby responsibility for the 'thing' is shared (even if it doesn't always work in practice). – Alice O'Grady

Real and careful sharing of and respect for the creative expression of different lived experiences. Explicit ongoing ethical discussion of who benefits from the arts work, how and why – Rebecca Laughton⁵⁹

For me truly authentic co-creation is a very long process of working with a community or group. It takes trust, patience and an open mind. It's hard work. I often question the originality of co-creation because as humans we go through life referencing experiences. – Ben Vleminckx⁶⁰

4.5.4 Doubts about describing participatory art as co-creation

There is one further question that deserves consideration here: is co-creation simply another of the fashionable labels to which the art world is partial? When participatory and community-based art practices emerged in the 1960s, the people involved settled easily enough on a simple term: community art. It was a signal of purpose and was understandable to the people that community artists wanted to work with. Other terms were used in other languages (e.g. *'action culturelle'* in France) but community art has proved clear and flexible enough to be adopted in other cultures, notably in the Netherlands and Scandinavia. By the 1990s, artists in Britain began to move away from the term for pragmatic reasons: it was associated by the dominant political culture with socialism and mediocrity.

Since the turn of the Millennium, as participatory art has become normalised, the number of terms created by artists, critics and academics has ballooned. Among the more widely used are: socially engaged practice, new genre public art, outreach, education projects, community-based arts development, relational aesthetics, participatory practice, applied theatre, community cultural development, cultural mediation, theatre for social change, engagement, dialogic practice and audience development. Like obscure sects, each has its advocates, keen to explain how its theory and practice is different from and better than the rest. Co-creation may just be the latest of these novel labels, enhanced by its use in fields outside the arts and allowing status-conscious artists to believe that their practice has nothing to do with old-fashioned projects being done 20 or 40 years ago under the name of community art. The suspicion that this is true may explain the reluctance to adopt the term expressed by some of those who continue to use the language and concepts developed in



the 1960s and 1970s. High Peak Community Arts expressed just such misgivings in their response to the Twitter thread:

On the other side of the fence it's not a term we would use often - to us it implies the professional artist is still the named 'owner' of the work and non-professionals are anonymous contributors. Question: just how 'co-' can that relationship be? ⁶¹

4.6 Principles of co-creation in participatory art

4.6.1 Practitioners defining principles

Although the picture of co-creation in the arts remains patchy, it appears that the concept is growing in acceptance and currency, and that those who are using it—primarily people working in participatory and community arts—are taking on the task of defining what it means to them, much as the community artists of the 1970s and 1980s worked hard to define the theoretical basis of their work. In this context, there have been at least two important attempts to establish some principles of co-creation, both led by practitioners, in one case working with researchers.

4.6.2 Co-Creating Change principles

Co-Creating Change is a British network of 114 arts and cultural organisations, of very different character and scale but all committed to working with communities. They have adopted 'a working definition' of co-creation, which they say they fully expect to change:

Co-creation is a co-operative process in which people with diverse experiences, skills and knowledge come together and work in non-hierarchical ways to address a common issue, and which enables people and communities to be actively involved in shaping the things which impact their lives. It shifts power, resource and ownership towards the people the work is intended to benefit, as opposed to the traditional 'top down' approach. It encourages every individual to activate their creative potential and realise their own ability to make change.⁶²

There is much to admire in this definition, but it is striking that it does not include the words art or culture. It could therefore describe certain approaches to education, community development or even environmental activism. Not everyone will see this as a problem and it is true that there has been a strand of opinion in community arts since the 1960s that the word 'art' is so burdened with ideological weight, and so alien to many people, that it is better not to use it. On the other hand, since the members of Co-Creating Change are art or cultural organisations, the avoidance of the word might be considered dishonest and even condescending. It can be argued that empowerment depends, at least in part, on people learning how language is used in society so as to be able to engage and remake it where necessary. The idea that participation in the cultural life of the community is a human right rests on the idea that art is a power (a capability) that people invented to their advantage,



and that everyone should therefore have access to it. It is the central idea of cultural democracy, but it cannot be achieved except by openly and directly creating art.

Having defined co-creation, the network then sets out eight principles that guide their work:

- Time:** Our work takes time. It takes time to build trusting relationships and find common purpose. This work can't be rushed.
- Care:** Our work is based on human relationships, and often takes place in complex settings, with people facing multiple challenges, and usually with limited resources. Care for each other, ourselves and the process are paramount.
- Trust:** Honesty is key for us building trusting relationships in which we can learn, share and grow together. Within the environments we create, everyone involved should feel listened to and heard, and comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas.
- Respect:** We respect the difference of experiences, knowledge and opinions of everyone in the room equally.
- Process:** Our work focusses on the process of co-creation. This is not to say the product (when there is one) that a co-created process leads to is not often of equal importance. But our primary focus is on the process of co-creation and the impacts this process has on the people involved, as well as the resulting products made.
- Risk:** We celebrate risk and failure. Sharing our failures and what hasn't worked is the best way for us to learn more about our own work and to help others to learn as well.
- Reflection:** We work iteratively, incorporating critical thinking and reflection into our practice, and making sure to continually capture and evaluate what we are doing. We test ideas, share our process with others and encourage dialogue and feedback. This open way of working improves our own work as well as that of others. We recognise the importance of reflection time so we can constantly learn and improve what we do.
- Generosity:** Openness and generosity with others is key to our work. There is a strong desire from the network to find common purpose and to be part of a wider movement in which we are all learning and progressing together.⁶³

Again, what is striking here is the absence of any mention of art or culture. It could also be said that these the principles are so general as to offer very little rigour or real guidance. It is hard to imagine anyone objecting to them, or believing that they do not fulfil them in their own practice. As such they are the artistic equivalent of motherhood and apple pie: everyone approves of them but they offer no method to achieving them or standard by which to judge performance.



4.6.3 Horizon 2020 ‘Co-Creation’ Project Principles

Between 2017 and 2020, Juliet Carpenter (Oxford Brookes University) led a project called Co-Creation with partners in Europe and Latin America and funded by the European Union through Horizon 2020, whose purpose was to bring together researchers, policymakers, residents and artists to address disadvantage in urban neighbourhoods.⁶⁴ The various case studies and other research are reported in a book edited by Christina Horvarth and Juliet Carpenter and entitled *Co-Creation in Theory and Practice: Exploring Creativity in the Global North and South*. In the introduction, they explain that:

A key innovation of our approach is to define Co-Creation as a knowledge process that employs creativity through arts-based methods as an alternative way to listen to the voices of marginalised communities and involve them in generating shared understandings of their neighbourhoods and (in)justices in the city.⁶⁵

In the project, they recognised the diversity of contexts in which projects would take place and the need to find guidance that would provide both rigour and flexibility. They therefore developed ten principles, which they explained they understood ‘both as a rule and as a foundation for belief and behaviour’.⁶⁶ These were divided between an ethos (articulating how beliefs should guide behaviours) and a methodological approach, concerned with process and practice.

ETHOS

- 1 **Equal** Co-Creation provides a safe environment for knowledge exchange, in which inequalities are recognised and mitigated against using strategies for power drawn up early on in the process.
- 2 **Respectful** All participants commit to respecting each other and the Co-Creation principles.
- 3 **Ethical** Ethical issues are handled with care following university procedures, and whenever possible, local labour is remunerated.
- 4 **Shared** The outcomes are the shared property of all participants and cannot be exploited without their previous consent.
- 5 **Trust-Based** Co-Creation aims to produce trust-based relationships. To facilitate this, participants are encouraged to spend time together, sharing meals and social space.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

- 6 **Embedded** Participants taking part in Co-Creation workshops are embedded in the urban area where the intervention happens.
- 7 **Aware** Co-Creation workshops are preceded by a series of stakeholder consultations to ensure that local needs, contextual specificities and existing knowledge are taken into account and that evaluation criteria are co-created with stakeholders at the beginning of the process.
- 8 **Plurivocal** All participants have a voice setting the goal(s) of Co-Creation workshops and the design of the activities is based on a consensus about what will be co-created.



- 9 **Active** All participants involved in Co-Creation workshops play active roles in preparing, running, documenting and analysing the creative process, be they researchers, artists or communities.
- 10 **Creative** Co-Creation workshops use art/creativity to produce outcomes, both tangible such as works of art or creative products, and intangible, such as networks and shared understanding. These outcomes are captured and evaluated.⁶⁷

When compared to the Co-Creating Change principles, these have the salient advantage of making direct reference to art and creativity as producing tangible and intangible outcomes, including works of art, social goods and knowledge. They are also more rigorous and challenging: it would be possible to know when they had been met (or not met). On the other hand, they reflect the circumstances and exigencies of a particular project, and are not therefore wholly relevant or replicable to the TRACTION trials. They do however offer some valuable ideas on which to build.

4.6.4 City Arts principles

Finally, it is worth sharing the principles drafted in 2018 by François Matarasso with and for City Arts, a 40-year-old community arts organisation in Nottingham. Rooted in an older practice of cultural democracy, they do not use the term co-creation, but the idea is nonetheless implicit throughout.

- Creative** because we make new art from today's ideas and interests
- Respectful** because everyone has the same right to participate in culture
- Empowering** because making art is a way to learn, grow and be stronger
- Ambitious** because everyone wants to achieve the best they can
- Trustworthy** because our work depends on mutual confidence
- Enjoyable** because if art doesn't bring pleasure, it's no use to anyone⁶⁸

When contrasted with the other two examples, the place of art is very clear in these principles. They are also notable for explaining the reasoning behind each word, and doing so in language and ideas that is intended to be accessible. It is also clear that some ideas are common to all three sets of principles: creativity, respect and trust. These values certainly guide TRACTION, but there remains work to define co-creation both as ethos and method.



5 TRACTION'S APPROACH TO CO-CREATION

5.1 Foundations

5.1.1 Building a shared understanding

The TRACTION kick-off meeting in San Sebastian, on 3-5 February 2020, gathered a consortium with a rich diversity of languages and cultures. From those first discussions, the value of the cross-disciplinary exchanges was apparent, but so too was the need to establish shared understanding of some key terms, so it was agreed to compile a TRACTION glossary. Co-creation was one of the first to be added:

Co-Creation: Creation that results from the interaction of people with different perspectives or disciplines (e.g. technologists and opera artists), as well as of professionals and non-professionals, as in participatory art. Co-creation can result in new ideas, products, technologies, approaches, artworks and more. Co-creation can be understood as a spectrum of power sharing. At one end control remains with the professionals while others (e.g. end users) are consulted about their needs. At the other, the professionals put their expertise in the control of the non-professionals without reservation. All points on this spectrum can be legitimate in different contexts and relating to specific needs. The critical issue is that everyone involved understands and agrees to the balance of power between them.

A year later, and in the light of the research and reflection undertaken, it is clear that we fell into the trap of using co-creation in at least two of the senses that were unpacked in Chapter Four. Perhaps because TRACTION does combine people with very different expertise, we saw it as a way to describe cross-disciplinary work, as well as co-operation between professionals and non-professionals. That now seems a mistake, and it is better to describe cross-disciplinary work as such, and to reserve co-creation to the second use only because of the distinctive questions of power distribution and the process of empowerment it involves.

On the other hand, that early definition did recognise another crucial idea, namely that co-creation is a spectrum of activity arising from the range of power relations that may be involved. The first idea defines the concept of co-creation for TRACTION, and the second provides a framework for analysis and comparison of different co-creation activities. This chapter outlines our current thinking in respect of each of these, before outlining the key characteristics of each community opera trial and describing how those have shaped the particular approach to co-creation taken by each partner. This spectrum of contexts and approaches is vital in offering possibilities for comparisons in the research.



5.1.2 Evaluating co-creation

The evaluation of TRACTION encompasses the technology, the co-creation process, the performances and the social impact of the trials. A preliminary report on evaluation of co-creation activities (Deliverable 4.3) has now been completed to provide an account of the methodology and mid-term findings. This evaluation is led by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and it was decided to take a bottom-up approach to defining co-creation, based on interviews with stakeholders associated with each trial supplemented by further interviews with arts students in Madrid. The detailed findings of that research are reported in Chapter Four of that report, and do not need to be repeated here, beyond saying that they are consistent with the analysis set out in the preceding chapters. In particular, they highlight the ethical dimension of co-creation and its spectrum of activity, noting that

Context-dependency is key: although the previous definitions help us understand how co-creation is viewed by different agents and have an impact on how these different agents would assess co-creation, TRACTION trials need to adapt to each context and define where they position themselves within broad concept of co-creation.⁶⁹

5.1.3 Professional and non-professional artists

As made clear in [Chapter Four](#), it is the co-operation of professionals and non-professionals that differentiates co-creation, both in its emergence within the business sector and in the its use within the arts. TRACTION uses this concept to describe both participatory art and co-creation, building on the ideas of consortium member François Matarasso, who argues that people become artists only by creating art, just as a person becomes a runner when they run.⁷⁰ The word artist defines an action, not a status, and is independent of any idea of quality. How good an artist is at making art, or a runner is at running, is separate from recognising the nature and meaning of their act. But there is a meaningful difference between someone who performs that act consistently and someone who does it once or occasionally. The difference is expressed in the idea of professionalism, which should not be limited to the narrow idea of payment—on that basis, there are very few professional poets—but involves a range of characteristics, including commitment, experience and recognition.

But—and this is central to TRACTION’s concept of co-creation—a non-professional artist also brings vital resources to the activity. They often have fresh ideas and insights, precisely because they are working outside the framework of a professional training and practice. Not knowing how something is normally done, and being unembarrassed by that ignorance, can be the first step towards new ideas and innovation. Non-professional artists also bring their own experiences, which can be the focus of the artistic work, as is the case in the SAMP community opera. Because this might be their only opportunity to create art, they sometimes feel a strong motivation to express their ideas and to be heard.



Professional artists	Non-professional artists
Education	An open mind
Skill and expertise	New ideas
Knowledge	Knowledge
Experience	Experience
Context	Something to say
Informed judgement	A need to say it
Talent	Talent

Table 1: The different resources of professional and non-professional artists

The combination of resources brought by professional and non-professional artists to co-creation leads not just to new work, but to new forms of artistic expression. In this perspective, co-creation is better understood as a novel form of art, rather than opening up an existing form to new participants. Janáček’s opera, *From the House of the Dead*, is set in a prison and based on Dostoevsky’s experience of imprisonment. Nonetheless, a professional performance of this opera is fundamentally different from SAMP’s opera co-created with the lived experience of young inmates. The meaning of the works and how they are encountered by audiences are far removed from one another.

5.1.4 The spectrum of co-creation

There is no correct or ideal version of co-creation. Each is contextual, and its successes and failures should be considered in relation to that context. So, as Figure 2 above suggests, it is better understood as a spectrum defined by the degree of control exercised by the professional and non-professional artists.

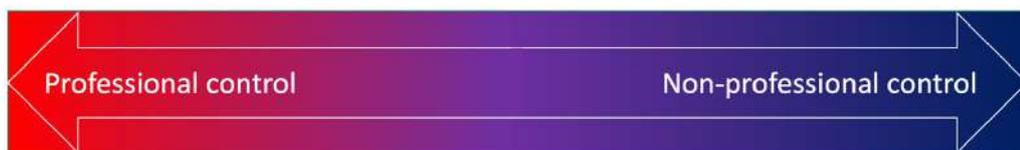


Figure 2, The spectrum of co-creation

Co-creation is central to TRACTION but, precisely because of the unpredictability introduced when professional and non-professional artists work together, the character of the three community opera productions varies enormously. Each trial is approaching the work in its own way, because of the organisations leading them, the communities involved, and other complex factors, including history, local culture, funding, politics and more. Personal and institutional aspirations also come into play.

	LICEU	SAMP	INO
Country	Spain	Portugal	Ireland
Territory	Urban neighbourhood	Provincial city	Country
Institution	Opera house	Music school	Opera producer
Participants	People with disabilities, students, people with a migrant experience, former sex workers, residents of Raval	Young prisoners, family members of offenders, former inmates, guards, residents of Leiria, justice ministry officials	Irish speakers living in remote areas, teenagers in rural communities, adults in Dublin
Venue	Opera house	Prison and concert hall	VR and festivals
Technology	Co-creation space Co-creation stage	Co-creation space Co-creation stage	Co-creation space Virtual reality

Table 2: Key characteristics of the TRACTION community opera trials

These differences of context, and the specific intentions of the professional artists leading each trial, mean that they do not interpret co-creation in the same way. Crucially, the balance of power between the people involved varies widely. The different purposes and approaches of TRACTION’s trials place them differently on the spectrum of co-creation.

The figure below is a simple representation of realities explained in the following sections of this chapter, but it is useful insofar as it clarifies the *relative* positions of the trials with respect to co-creation. However, it should not be taken to suggest either that those positions are fixed or that everyone involved in each trial sees them in the same way.



Figure 3, The TRACTION community opera trials on the spectrum of co-creation

Co-creation is dynamic, and can be empowering: it is in the nature of the work to produce change in people’s desires, capabilities and perceptions. Furthermore, since every co-creation project is a coalition of different people and organisations, it should be expected that they have different views about where the project should be on that spectrum. So the reality is much less binary and less fixed than this figure suggests.

Paulo Freire contrasted two models of education that he called ‘banking’ and ‘problem-solving’ and the distinction is important, just as it is between cultural democratisation and cultural democracy, or between participatory art and community art. Still, it is also true that life is less tidy, because, as Freire himself argued, men and women are:



Unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. [...] The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity.⁷¹

Co-creation, like Freire's problem-solving education, is a process that changes reality, and itself changes as a result. It cannot be a fixed thing: indeed, the more equal the power relations between the professionals and non-professionals, the less stable they will be. Only if one group is in control can they know with confidence what will happen, which is one reason why funders are misguided to require or expect predictable outcomes from these projects.

That diversity between the trials, and the range of ways in which they are using co-creation, are assets for TRACTION, since they allow illuminating contrasts to emerge. They also mean that the case studies cover a wider range and have more relevance to the opera profession. If TRACTION worked only with a great opera house, or a music school or an opera producer, we would learn less and be able to offer less useful knowledge to others wanting to use co-creation as a pathway to social inclusion. The rest of this Chapter describes each trial's distinctive situation and how it has defined their approach to co-creation. The preliminary results of these co-creation activities are reported separately in Deliverable 4.3, *Co-creation and user training evaluation*.

5.2 LICEU: Co-creating Grand Opera

5.2.1 Overview



The LICEU trial is the largest and most ambitious of the TRACTION operas. Every aspect of the project flows from the commitment to present a new opera with and about the people of the Raval neighbourhood, in which the theatre stands, on the main stage of this 170-year-old institution. It is hard to imagine a more powerful statement of inclusion. By inviting the people of Raval and their stories into this space, the LICEU publicly affirms that they have the same importance as the great artists who usually perform there. There have been community operas before, but rarely, if ever, have they focused so sharply on the community's own story or been presented on the main stage of an opera house.⁷² In doing so, the LICEU is also seeking to recast its relationship with the people of Barcelona, demonstrating a new openness to and interest in their lives and concerns. Opera Prima, as the Raval project is named by the theatre, is intended as the first step in a sustained commitment to community opera, with further productions with different partners in Catalonia. It aims, in short, for a transformation in the place of the opera house in the life of the city.



El Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona

At the same time, this is a highly risky project. To sing from the stage of an opera house, and convince the 2,200 people in the auditorium that you deserve to be there, is an enormous challenge. Many highly trained singers would hesitate to accept it: only the very best earn a living this way. There is a risk that an opera created and performed with non-professional artists in this place could be a failure. It is impossible to guarantee a success in the theatre: productions in which hundreds of people have invested time, money and care sometimes close after a single performance. If the production is co-created by professional and non-professional artists, the risk of failure is inevitably higher. So are the consequences. Bad reviews may bruise a singer's ego and confidence, but are accepted as part of the business. Non-professionals who have been invited and encouraged to expose themselves to such criticism have no reason to be prepared for it. Participatory art can have a deep social impact when a person's confidence, identity and self-esteem is strengthened by the response of their social circle to impressive and unexpected achievement. It can also cause harm if the response to someone's effort, trust and hope is negative. The effects may be especially damaging for people who already experience social exclusion. The result then is likely to confirm their experience that society is hostile to them and their values.

The LICEU is a large and complex institution, with 300 employees, many departments, and diverse stakeholders. These people naturally have different views about the desirability and feasibility of community opera: some are enthusiastic, others sceptical, and many have yet to make up their mind. Outcomes will be shaped by how the LICEU's own community responds to and changes through the experience. Given the high profile of the project (its progress is being documented for Catalan television) it is especially important that it should be a success. How the community opera is judged will determine whether the LICEU



continues to open itself and its work to the wider community, and the confidence and creativity with which it approaches subsequent projects



El Monstre al Laberint, Curtain Call, 24 April 2021

5.2.2 LICEU Community dialogue and co-creation activities

The LICEU trial follows an important but risky path, where success or failure bring equally important consequences. It does so with limited experience of co-creation or participatory art. Until now, the theatre has seen inclusion principally through the lens of accessibility, welcoming new audiences through the [apropria cultura](#) programme, and using techniques such as surtitles, audio-description and sign language interpretation to make performances more inclusive to people with various disabilities. It has also significantly strengthened its education programmes for schools, through introductory performances at the theatre, supported by classroom learning activities.

The theatre has also taken a big step in the Raval project by presenting Jonathan Dove's *The Monster in the Maze* as a co-creation project with 600 high school students. The Catalan version of this text, *El Monstre al Laberint*, received a concert performance at the Grec Festival in 2018.⁷³ The fully-staged LICEU production updated the ancient myth to take in the climate crisis, migration and political tyranny. Delayed by the pandemic, the première on 24 April 2021 was an electrifying performance in the theatre's main auditorium. The project has brought the LICEU invaluable learning and its success will be a boost to the theatre's confidence for Opera Prima Raval.

LICEU's approach to co-creation is shaped by the scale of the task they have taken on, and the risks involved. So co-creation in this trial is led by the professional artists, who retain primary control of the production. Co-creation with people from Raval is being undertaken through a series of projects, including:



- Conversations between the librettist, Victoria Szpunberg and local people to develop ideas for the story of the opera;
- Co-creation of opera poster designs by disabled creatives at Sínia Occupational Centre and art students at Escola Massana;
- Costume co-creation between the production designer, the LICEU costume department and Raval NGOs including Dona Kolors and Top Manta;
- Rehearsals and performances with local amateur choirs, led by the Escola de Músics.

The table below outlines the principal co-creation activities undertaken since the relaxation of public health restrictions made it possible to begin this part of the project.

SINIA – ESCOLA MASSANA Disabled people and art school students	DONA KOLORS, TOP MANTA and other NGOs People at risk of social exclusion
Visual branding co-creation workshops	Costume co-creation workshops
14 Sessions	4 Sessions (to date)
18 non-professional artists	12+ non-professional artists (to date)
5 Professional artists	3 Professional artists
17.12.20 – 9.4.21	17.12.20 – 30.4.21

Table 3: LICEU community opera trial co-creation activities to April 2021

Alongside these main strands of co-creation, a number of other activities have been undertaken over the winter. It is often difficult, and not always meaningful, to separate these between community dialogue and co-creation, since the boundary between the two activities are not rigid. They might best be seen as *preparatory* co-creation activities since they involve creative work, but which is not usually intended to contribute directly to the opera itself. These activities have included performances by Liceu artists, discussions about opera, and visits to performances by community members and several partners in Raval, including Diàlegs interculturals de Dona, La Boqueria Market, Sant Pau Santa Creu Library, Institut Milà i Fontanal and Xamfrà Music School; online workshop with older residents of Raval in lockdown by students from Miquel Tarradell High School, supported by Liceu artists; and choral performances by non-professional artists from Escola de Músics and Xamfrà in front of the Liceu with musicians from the opera.

Co-creation is another area where lines are blurred in the LICEU trial. The co-creation work involving disabled people from the Sínia Occupational Centre and students from Escola Massana tests the distinction between professional and non-professional artists because both groups could be regarded as semi-professional artists. They spend a lot of time working as artists, and to some degree identify as artists. Since their work was also supported by more experienced and established artists, the definition holds, but it underlines the need to avoid rigidity in thinking about co-creation. The stunning results of their work, which were presented to the LICEU director and members of the Opera Prima Raval professional team in April 2021, shows the richness of the co-creation process, because the images define an original aesthetic that has been shaped by the interaction of all those involved.



Creatives from Sínia Occupational Centre and students from Escola Massana, LICEU, April 2021

The LICEU's approach ensures that failure of any one element will not threaten the overall production. It does limit the influence of non-professionals on the artistic development of the opera, which should probably be seen as a production with varying degrees of community participation. But given what is at stake, this is a prudent approach that gives the project its best chance of a successful outcome and therefore of ensuring further, and more equally balanced, co-creation work by LICEU with communities.

In this respect, the Covid-19 pandemic has created an unexpected and positive opportunity. The LICEU community opera performance was scheduled for two evenings in November 2021, but it has been postponed until October 2022, which is too late to be fully included in the research. So TRACTION proposed presenting a showcase of work in progress during the intervening period, both to maintain momentum and to meet research needs. This has been agreed and the Showcase will take place on 3 March 2022 in the Foyer Room at the Liceu, and in one or more location in Raval, using the Co-Creation Stage technology to connect the two. This is an important moment for everyone, but also a much less demanding performance than the main stage production. As a result, it gives a valuable opportunity to test additional co-creation activities in the lead-up to the full production. The Showcase will act as a safe space for further experiments in co-creation.



5.3 SAMP: Co-creating social knowledge



The SAMP community opera trial is at the other end of the co-creation spectrum to LICEU, partly because it is the trial furthest from conventional forms of opera production. First, SAMP is a music school, not an opera company, and its *raison d'être* is learning and community participation. It has an orchestra, a choir and a band, all with non-professional musicians, working with professionals. Indeed, SAMP does not normally produce opera at all. It is only in its work with Leiria youth prison that it has created operas before: *Don Giovanni* in 2015 and *Così fan Tutti* in 2017.



Co-creation workshop in the Mozart Pavilion, Leiria Prison, April 2021

The TRACTION trial is a big step up, and therefore a risk, principally because this production will be made entirely with and about the communities of the prison and the town around it. For the first time, SAMP's opera will tell a story the inmates have chosen and shaped. The role of the professional artists is to support them in doing that to the highest standard and the deepest truth they can achieve. In this trial, it is the librettist and the composers who are finding co-creation challenging, because they are used to consulting only themselves about their work. Here, the community is almost in the role of a commissioner or a client whose wishes the professional artists need to meet.

The SAMP trial has none of the expectation that comes with putting people on the stage of the LICEU, though there will be public performances at the prestigious Gulbenkian Concert Hall in Lisbon as well as at the prison. But the Mozart operas were also performed there, and the new production does not involve additional or unanticipated difficulties. Nonetheless, the SAMP trial is equally ambitious in its artistic and social goals.



Co-creation workshop in the Mozart Pavilion, Leiria Prison, April 2021

Artistically, the SAMP trial breaks new ground in co-creating the opera with four different and not necessarily mutually-sympathetic groups: the young inmates; prison guards and staff; relatives, friends and former inmates; and residents of Leiria. The opera now being co-created has to accommodate each group's ideas, hopes and needs in a form that is artistically compelling to audiences who may have no connection with the experiences from which it has come. The participants are involved in all aspects of the co-creation and production processes, including the narrative, composition, design, rehearsal and performance. TRACTION technology, especially Co-Creation Stage, is a means of connecting these groups and enabling them to co-create together, but success depends on the *human* connections it enables. In the SAMP trial, co-creation between the different groups of non-professionals is as important as co-creation between them and the professional artists.

Since the first prison opera production in 2015, SAMP has been engaged in discussions with the management and the Ministry of Justice about the value of art in criminal justice and its place in offender rehabilitation. Participation in a prestigious European research project strengthens SAMP's evidence base and brings national attention to the opera production. The trial has the potential to change policy and practice not just at the youth prison in Leiria but across the prison service, if it can show the value of its approach. However, if the project is seen as unsuccessful, there is a risk that the credibility of the arts in criminal justice may be set back. The nature of the co-creation, and the extent to which it offers space for empowerment of inmates, are central to that result. SAMP's trial shows it to be a social justice innovator, working from the grass roots for institutional and policy change.⁷⁴

5.3.1 SAMP Co-creation activities

Like all the trials, SAMP's co-creation work was affected by the pandemic and the public health measures. It is to SAMP's credit that they were the only arts organisation permitted



to continue work in a Portuguese prison during 2020, and shows the regard in which that is held within the Ministry of Justice. Even so, Covid-19 outbreaks at the prison interrupted the work on more than one occasion. They had to wait until 29 July 2020 to begin sessions, which continued until 2 October; they ran again between 9 November and 25 November, when the prison was again in lockdown. Even when the SAMP musicians could enter the prison, staff shortages (often caused by illness) and security issues sometimes meant that the planned session could not take place.

Work also began with the guards and staff, leading to the establishment of a choir. Working with inmates’ relatives proved to be the most difficult part of the project, because of travel restrictions. Furthermore, since many of the project participants live in situations of economic and social precarity, they were affected especially badly by the pandemic; this was also the case in Barcelona and, to a lesser degree in Ireland. Some of these people also have limited if any access to a smart phone or computer so even the online co-creation sessions that have been so successful in Ireland were not possible. Simply staying in touch with people during the crisis was often an important outcome for the project.

LEIRIA YOUTH PRISON Young inmates (18-25)	LEIRIA YOUTH PRISON Guards and staff	LISBON Relatives of inmates
32 Sessions	4 Sessions	3 Sessions
82 non-professional artists	12 non-professional artists	20 non-professional artists
8 Professional artists	8 Professional artists	4 Professional artists
29.3.20 – 25.3.21	30.07.20 – 13.11.20	29.3.20 – 25.4.2021

Table 4: SAMP community opera trial co-creation activities to April 2021

The SAMP trial will lead to four performances of work in progress in June 2021, and four of the final opera in June 2022. Each year, two performances will take place in Lisbon and two at the prison in Leiria, but all will use Co-Creation Stage technology to link performers in different locations, thus connecting the Mozart Pavilion in the prison with locations outside.

5.4 INO: Co-creating virtual reality

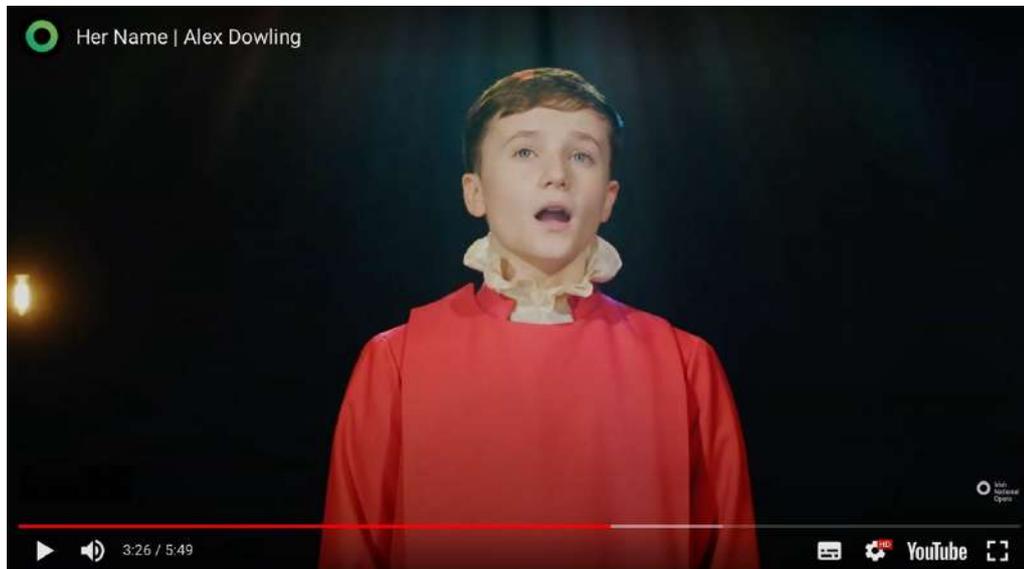
5.4.1 Overview of co-creation in INO



In producing what we believe will be the world’s first virtual reality community opera, the Irish National Opera trial prioritises technological and artistic innovation. There is little agreement about how to define opera, but for many people it is the beauty of unamplified, unmediated singing that distinguishes it for every other form of musical theatre. If that is true, then opera has faced an uphill struggle as the quality and range of recording technologies grew during the last century. The distinctive place of the living voice is not in question, but



nothing stands still, and opera must always respond to contemporary life and the interests of its audiences. It is also true that full scale live opera requires the resources of a large lyric theatre, something that is rare outside major cities. The island of Ireland has only three such venues (in Dublin, Cork and Belfast), which means that conventional opera is simply inaccessible to much of the population.



Still from 'Her Name' one of 20 short opera films made by INO during lockdown

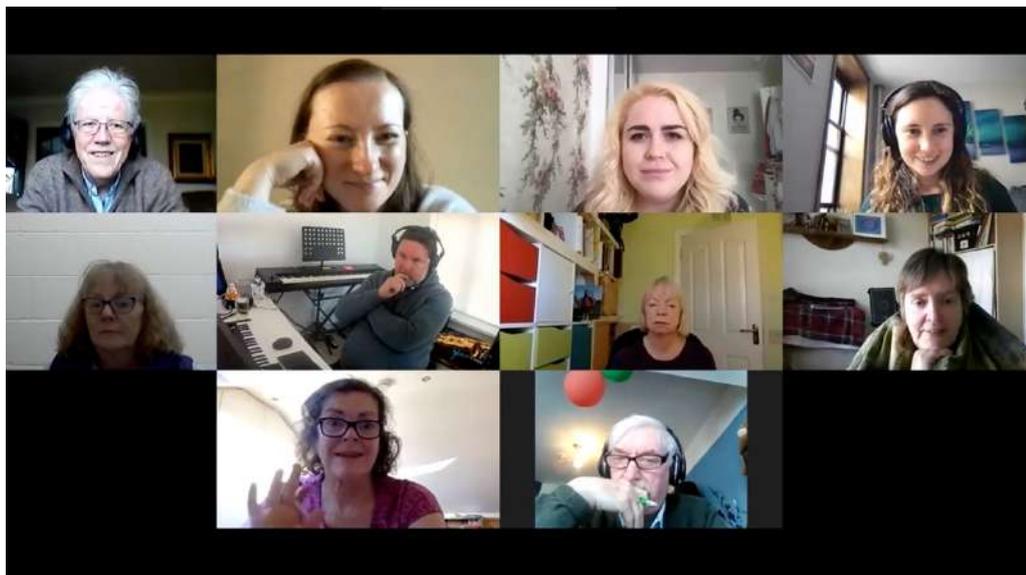
In the 20th century recordings and live broadcasts went some way to extending access, and the internet and cinema streaming have further improved access in the 21st. But neither can offer the kind of immersive experience that the opera house is created to produce. The INO trial is therefore testing the potential of virtual reality headsets to offer an artistic experience which, while clearly not the same as live opera, is a powerful alternative. The difference with broadcast, recording and streaming technologies is that a VR opera is not a less rewarding reproduction of something that has existed in an original form. It is an experience created for and existing only in the VR platform. It is not opera—in the sense of unmediated sung drama—but nor is it an echo of it. A VR opera is a new artistic experience, that stands or falls on its own merits.

There have been some experiments with creating opera in VR already, none perhaps yet wholly satisfying. Why then add the complexity of bringing non-professional artists into the process? One good reason for doing so is that, not being trained in working with established forms, they bring a fresh perspective that can be invaluable when confronted by new technologies. In such situations, established artists need to learn not only novel techniques but the distinctive language of the new technology. The invention of photography not only required completely new methods of any artists ventured into the field, but the development of new ways of seeing that were intrinsic to the medium, and would also transform understandings of the existing medium of painting. The natural starting point in such moments is to take something that succeeds in existing technology into the new form. Thus early



television dramas were obviously written by radio writers who had not yet learnt that much of what they were used to explaining to listeners was understood by viewers in an instant.

The INO trial invites non-professional to investigate VR with professional artists in a shared process of co-creation whose terms and outcomes are undecided. Although the professionals bring their usual resources of knowledge, experience and ability, they are working in a medium that is as unfamiliar to them as it is to the non-professionals. In some ways, that makes the co-creation process unusually balanced, since there are really no experts. By working with three very different groups of people, including teenagers, Irish speakers living in remote communities and adults from greater Dublin, the trial embraces further creative openness, as people with each of these backgrounds are likely to bring different ideas and questions. There is everything to learn here, including how to bring the concepts and methods of VR creation within reach of all the artists. As the work moves from being art-led (narrative, composition and design) to needing VR techniques, new problems and opportunities will reveal themselves, and the open minds of all the artists—professional and non-professional—will be a great asset.



INO co-creation workshop with residents of Inis Meáin, March 2021

5.4.2 INO Co-creation activities

The co-creation process is currently being developed through a series of four-week online workshop blocks focusing on creative writing, music and design. The model has been developed in response to the Covid 19 crisis, but has already proved surprisingly successful, with (mostly) high attendance and engagement. A total of 44 different non-professional artists have taken part in 27 co-creation activities by April. Most of them came to at least four sessions of the different blocks with each of the three groups (see Table 5 below) and many have come to more. On average 10 non-professionals participated in each session, though



in individual sessions the numbers ranged considerably. The co-creation process was facilitated by professional artists, with a TRACTION team member from INO also present.

INIS MEÁIN Irish speaking adults	MUSIC GENERATION Young people	TALLAGHT/SOUTH DUBLIN Adults
4 Creative Writing co-creation workshops 5.2.21 to 5.3.21	4 Creative Writing co-creation workshops 10.2.21 – 4.3.21	4 Creative Writing co-creation workshops 11.03.21 – 1.4.21
4 Art and design co-creation workshops 4.3.21 – 25.3.21	4 Art and design co-creation workshops May 2021	4 Art and design co-creation workshops 23.3.21 – 4.4.21
4 Music composition co-creation workshops 9. 4.21 – ongoing	4 Music composition co-creation workshops May 2021	4 Music composition co-creation workshops May 2021
1 Co-creation process session 16.4.21	1 Co-creation process session 21.4.21	1 Co-creation process session 28.4.21

Table 5: INO community opera trial co-creation activities to April 2021

These activities have been very successful from both an artistic and a social perspective. The co-creation process has produced a rich body of narrative, visual and music ideas, which the professional artists—composer Finola Merivale and director Jo Mangan—are beginning to look at from the perspective of the eventual opera. A core group of committed non-professionals is emerging through the co-creation activities, and the INO team are looking at how to facilitate their continuing participation outside the framework of conventional workshop activities. The premiere of the opera is planned for Spring 2022, followed by touring throughout Ireland.

6 TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH TO CO-CREATION



Art produced during INO co-creation workshops on Inis Meáin, March 2021

6.1 Why a new approach?

This paper shows co-creation to be a new and evolving term, much more complicated than appears at first sight. It emerged in response to the transformation of business' operating environments brought about by globalisation and new technology. The transference of co-creation to other fields raises questions about the appropriateness of its commercial values and purposes in public services, governance and culture. This is compounded, certainly in the arts, by uneven awareness of the term's origins or its ambiguities. That has encouraged its rapid adoption and use but it may hide the real differences in people's objectives and expectations as much as it facilitates co-operation. Disagreements are exacerbated when language prevents people from knowing that they do not agree until they are already engaged in a process of cooperation.

This matters because co-creation always involves professionals and non-professionals in a process of value creation. Inequalities of power are therefore written into its DNA. Such inequalities are not inevitably problematic: they exist, in different ways, in almost every aspect of human relations. What matters is whether they are understood, how they are managed and whether they change through the co-creation process. In the cultural sector, the two historic forms of policy—cultural democratisation and cultural democracy—also reflect inequalities of power in the relationship between professionals and non-professionals. One key difference between them is the extent to which those inequalities are acknowledged, problematised and resolved. The first policy tends to minimise them in order to conserve existing social relations; the second focuses on them in pursuit of emancipatory change. The fragmentation of cultural policy since the 1980s, and the limited expertise and interest in



its questions among cultural professionals, have combined to leave the cultural sector particularly exposed to the exploitation of power behind a façade of good intentions.

Inequality in co-creation is not limited to the distribution of power between actors in the process. It also concerns the exploitation of value created. At present, such value accrues generally to the professional artists and institutions involved, and very little to the non-professionals. Theatres, galleries and orchestras who have co-created work with local people not only present it to their audiences, but use it as the basis of the funding bids. Individual artists build careers and reputations on the works they have co-created with non-professionals, who are generally unknown and unrewarded. Most of them would object vehemently to the comparison, but it is hard to avoid seeing parallels between some co-creation practices and the extraction of value advocated in some forms of business.

6.2 The basis for rethinking co-creation and cultural policy

Co-creation is a powerful resource, capable of producing value in all sorts of innovative forms. It has long roots and is growing in popularity and use: it is here to stay. But it is a double-edged sword, as capable of preserving inequalities and exploiting the vulnerable as it is of empowering people and thus transforming social situations. The challenge therefore must be to clarify its values, purposes and practices so that its use is at least clearer to everyone involved. In a democratic society, people are free to pursue their cultural interests in whatever way seems good to them, so all approaches to co-creation remain legitimate. But it must be clearer to everyone involved what purposes and values are being served.

It is also necessary to reconsider the policy framework within such practices occur, especially if, as seems to be the case, the two alternatives that have dominated public culture in Europe since the 19th century are poorly adapted to the 21st, or have simply become exhausted. Is the binary division between cultural democratisation and cultural democracy still a basis for thinking about culture and society, or is it time to think again?

The grant agreement promises that ‘by combining best practice in participatory art with digital technology’s innovations of language, form and process, TRACTION will define new approaches to co-creation’. It is only now, more than a year into the project, that we can begin to see the importance of this ambition and the potential shape of a new approach, founded on Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the capabilities approach first applied to culture in the 2020 Rome Charter. This has the potential to challenge existing beliefs and offer a new conceptual framework for cultural policy. It is to this task that the TRACTION partnership must now apply itself.

Orian Brook, Dave O’Brien and Mark Taylor, conclude their 2020 survey of British cultural policy with this stirring challenge:

Ultimately, we will need a new theory of value, both of the value of culture, and of the value of persons. These, and many more, changes will be needed to sever the long-standing



link between elite dominance of cultural production and consumption and social inequality.⁷⁵

TRACTION now hopes to contribute to that new theory of the value of culture, even if we will rest on older ideas of the value of persons.



The Musicals Choir, whose members will perform in the LICEU trial, April 2021



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NOTES

- ¹ <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> This right has since been affirmed and expanded in a succession of further international treaties: see Anderson, J. 2010: 14
- ² Snowman 2009: 2
- ³ It is significant that, even in this short extract co-creation is seen as synonymous with co-design; elsewhere it is used interchangeably with co-production.
- ⁴ Abbate & Parker 2015: 38
- ⁵ Cf. Shriner 2001
- ⁶ Bourdieu 1984
- ⁷ Matarasso 2019: 136-37
- ⁸ Arnold 1993
- ⁹ Liebersohn 2016: 383
- ¹⁰ Cf. Rose 2010
- ¹¹ Maleuvre 2016: 9 (emphasis in original).
- ¹² Weingartner 2012
- ¹³ Judt 2010: Kindle location: 8322
- ¹⁴ Fleury, L., 2016, *Sociologie de la culture et des pratiques culturelles*, Paris : Armand Colin (Kindle Edition) « un projet de conversion du public à des formes symboliques valorisées qui suppose une stratégie de prosélytisme tournée vers les masses et au service des



œuvres savantes ou lettrées, en se donnant pour objectif de faire pratiquer au plus grand nombre la fréquentation et le culte des œuvres jugées légitimes »

- ¹⁵ Weingartner 2012, Kindle location 2209
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Matt Peacock, a member of TRACTION’s international Advisory committee, founded Streetwise Opera to work with people experiencing homelessness in 2001. His work was a response to a notorious remark by Sir George Young MP, then a Conservative Housing Minister, who had told the BBC that the homeless were the ‘people you step over when you leave the opera’ (Radio 4 Today Programme, 29 June 1991).
- ¹⁸ Timmins 2017, Kindle location 10103
- ¹⁹ The UK Government’s Taking Part Survey reports that the ‘proportion of respondents who had engaged with the arts in the last 12 months’ was 76% in 2019/20, exactly where it was in 2005/06 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201920-arts/arts-taking-part-survey-201920> (accessed 27.4.2021)
- ²⁰ Brook, O’Brien & Taylor 2020: 108
- ²¹ Brook, O’Brien & Taylor 2020: 179. See also Carey, O’Brien & Gable 2021, which considers barriers to social mobility in the much larger field of the creative industries.
- ²² James 2007: xxi
- ²³ CDs of the aptly titled ‘Memory Almost Full’ were given away free with the Mail on Sunday on 10 May 2008: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-565501/Free-CD-inside-weeks-Mail-Sunday-Paul-McCartneys-Memory-Almost-Full.html>
- ²⁴ Abbate & Parker 2015: 515
- ²⁵ « C’est [...] notre attitude même à l’égard de la culture qui se trouve mise en question de la façon la plus radicale. Quelle que soit la pureté de nos intentions, cette attitude apparaît en effet à une quantité considérable de nos concitoyens comme une option faite par des privilégiés en faveur d’une culture héréditaire, particulariste, c’est-à-dire tout simplement bourgeoise. » *La Déclaration de Villeurbanne* : <https://sht.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/1-villeurbanne-declaration.pdf>
- ²⁶ « Car il est maintenant tout à fait clair qu’aucune définition de la culture ne sera valable, n’aura de sens, qu’au prix d’apparaître utile aux intéressés eux-mêmes. » *La Déclaration de Villeurbanne* : <https://sht.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/1-villeurbanne-declaration.pdf>
- ²⁷ Council of Europe 1976: 151-2
- ²⁸ Matarasso 2013
- ²⁹ Matarasso 2019: 19-29; Dupin-Meynard & Négrier 2020
- ³⁰ Waldman 2019; <https://www.1418now.org.uk>
- ³¹ Matarasso 1997; 2013.
- ³² ACE 2020: 9



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- ³³ ACE 2020: 64 (highlight added)
- ³⁴ ACE 2020: 64 (highlight added)
- ³⁵ 64 Million Artists 2018: 12
- ³⁶ Horvath & Carpenter 2020: 45
- ³⁷ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/8364/Co-creation> (accessed 3.3.2021)
- ³⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/co-creating> (accessed 3.3.2021)
- ³⁹ The question that started the thread was posted by François Matarasso on [22 March 2021](#): 'What do artists mean by 'co-creation'? I'm writing about the concept and it's like untangling a ball of string after a kitten has got to it. If you use the term, please tell me what it means to you - I would really like to hear people's views' [Marcus Romer](#) replied the same day.
- ⁴⁰ The hierarchal traditions of classical music were a factor in enabling sexual misconduct that has come to light in recent years, and caused harm to many people as well as tarnishing the reputation of the sector. The dismissal in 2019 of James Levine as music director of New York Metropolitan Opera after 40 years is one instance among many: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/mar/13/conductor-james-levine-fired-by-new-york-metropolitan-opera> (accessed 27.4.2021)
- ⁴¹ Ramaswamy & Gouillart 2010: 4
- ⁴² Ramaswamy & Gouillart 2010: 7
- ⁴³ Cf. Brandsen, Steen & Verschuere 2018
- ⁴⁴ Ramaswamy & Gouillart 2010: 7
- ⁴⁵ Redlich, Moritz & Wulfsberg 2019: Kindle Edition
- ⁴⁶ Cf. Wilkinson & Pickett 2019: 247
- ⁴⁷ <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&q=%2Fm%2F0266bnf,%2Fm%2F09mh9w> (accessed 28.4.2021).
- ⁴⁸ Google Trends suggests that *co-creation* is more widely used outside the English-speaking world, and notably in continental Europe: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&q=co-creation> (accessed 28.4.2021). In the USA, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, *community arts* is more common: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&q=community%20art> (accessed 28.4.2021).
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Bourriaud 1998, Brown & Novak-Leonard 2011.
- ⁵⁰ Walmsley 2013: 116-117
- ⁵¹ Walmsley 2013: 111
- ⁵² https://twitter.com/JumpedUp_Kate/status/1374035663960555521
- ⁵³ <https://twitter.com/nedglasier/status/1374011112052699138>
- ⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/lucindajarrett/status/1382996321003569152>
- ⁵⁵ https://twitter.com/abdul_shayek/status/1374991293831593984



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- ⁵⁶ <https://twitter.com/rosieabeast/status/1374011785490092040>
- ⁵⁷ <https://twitter.com/ThomsonPat/status/1374719679864930305>
- ⁵⁸ On 19 March 2021, a Tasmanian arts festival [tweeted](#) ‘On behalf of artist Santiago Sierra, we are looking for people to take part in Union Flag: a new artwork that will see the Union Jack immersed in the blood of its colonised territories at Dark Mofo 2021.’ The outcry at inviting First Nations people to donate blood for this project caused its cancellation within days, as reported by CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/dark-mofo-art-festival-blood-scli-intl/index.html>
- ⁵⁹ <https://twitter.com/Hayeslaughton/status/1374070101901721601>
- ⁶⁰ https://twitter.com/ben_vleminckx/status/1374657407033442307
- ⁶¹ <https://twitter.com/HighPeakComArts/status/1375020849879736320>
- ⁶² <http://www.cocreatingchange.org.uk/about/>
- ⁶³ <http://www.cocreatingchange.org.uk/about/>
- ⁶⁴ <https://www.co-creation-network.org>
- ⁶⁵ Horvath & Carpenter 2020: 24
- ⁶⁶ Horvath & Carpenter 2020: 29
- ⁶⁷ Horvath & Carpenter 2020: 30-32
- ⁶⁸ <https://city-arts.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>
- ⁶⁹ See TRACTION Deliverable 4.3, p.20
- ⁷⁰ Matarasso 2019: 48
- ⁷¹ Freire 2000: 84
- ⁷² Community productions in opera houses, have tended to be existing operas with a role for amateurs (e.g. Britten’s *Noye’s Flood*) or oratorio-style pieces telling universal stories and with large choral ensembles (Erollyn Wallen, *Carbon 12* at WNO, or Jonathan Dove, *The Monster in the Maze*, Berlin, Wuppertal, Barcelona etc.).
- ⁷³ <https://www.barcelona.cat/grec/axiugrec/espectacle/el-monstre-al-laberint>
- ⁷⁴ Horvath & Carpenter 2020: 21
- ⁷⁵ Brook, O’Brien & Taylor 2020: 282